

Listening Skills

Introduction

We take in words, their sounds and their meanings all the time during our waking hours. We also often ‘overhear’ or ‘catch’ what people are saying to each other. It is not necessary or required that we grasp or register all that is said on these occasions. What we are doing most of the time is merely ‘hearing’ language being used in speaking. However, at other times, we are expected to listen, understand and respond to spoken language, for example, in a conversation or during a lecture. Here we are not just ‘hearing’ people but ‘listening’ to them with attention.

Although listening is cultivated naturally and without specific instruction, it is one of the most important skills in language learning as also in social interaction. We often hear the complaint that someone is not a good listener or, conversely, the compliment that someone is a very good listener. Obviously, this does not mean that some people can hear better, but rather that some people come across as more **attentive** and more **empathetic** in conversation than others. They also seem to **process information** more keenly and fully than those who are poorer listeners.

Is it possible to improve our own listening skills? Can we become better listeners than before? How can listening better prove beneficial to us? These are some of the questions we seek to answer in this module. It includes some points you can ponder over and practise as well as some activities you would be required to engage in as you go through what follows.

Learning Objectives

- 1) Cultivating better attention to sound, meaning and tone
- 2) Improving clarity in listening
- 3) Listening for specific information/ detail
- 4) Listening for gist and overall message/thrust

Preliminary activity

(Estimated time allotted to activity: 10-12 minutes)

Shut your eyes for two minutes and listen to the sounds around you.

A) After you have done this, list the different kinds of sounds you heard. Try to use precise words/phrases to describe these sounds.

B) Now, linking these sounds, write a short paragraph on your experience of listening for two minutes. Remember to write not only about the sounds but also your response to them. For example, did a certain sound irritate you or seem pleasant to you? Did another sound remind you or alert you of something? Did you draw any inference or make any passing observation as you concentrated on the sounds?

Note that while performing part A) of this activity you focused on the details of what you had listened to, whereas, while performing part B) you had to relate or string together one detail to another and use your thoughts and feelings to bring your response to the overall experience. These two processes are two essential aspects of listening skills, i.e., listening for **specific detail** and listening in order to digest the **overall impact or gist** respectively.

Listening for detail

Listen to the following audio clip. It is a short excerpt from an Indian film in English. After you have listened to it, click on the 'next' button to answer the questions that follow.

(Play clip of length 7 minutes approx.)

Activity 1 (10 minutes)

- 1) Where do you think the conversation is taking place? What makes you think so?
- 2) How many people did you hear in the clip? Did you gather their names or identities? Give a label to each of them.
- 3) List the different kinds of vehicles you heard in the clip.
- 4) What is each person in the clip doing?

Now listen to the clip again and try to gather details of what you might have missed at first hearing. In addition, try to make a note of the emotional responses of the characters to each other. For instance, you might say that someone is 'surprised', 'happy', 'disappointed', 'annoyed', 'angry' or 'puzzled'.

Activity 2 (10 minutes)

Fill in the blank in the following summary of what you have heard in the audio clip:

- 1) At the beginning of the clip, we can hear sounds of _____ such as _____ and

_____.

_____ people are heard in conversation. They seem to be _____ (doing what?)

They have reached _____. _____ wants to go to a road called _____

_____. She describes a _____ coloured house owned by _____.

_____ is evidently upset. She says she is _____.

- 2) The road they are on is called _____.

Meanwhile, there is a call. The caller is called _____. Another voice is heard. It seems to belong to _____.

_____ says she can't go on because she has _____. She also reminds _____ that _____ are to come home so they must return. _____ protests saying _____.

At this, _____ sounds very _____ and says she is turning back. _____'s answer is "Turn!". It shows she is _____.
